

FOREIGN GOLD AND SILVER COIN.

LETTER

FROM THE

SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY,

TRANSMITTING

A report respecting the quality and value of foreign gold and silver coin.

MARCH 2, 1854.—Ordered to be printed.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT,

March 1, 1854.

SIR: I have the honor to transmit, herewith, the report of the Director of the United States mint, "of the fineness and value of certain foreign gold and silver coins, as required by the acts of Congress of January 25, 1834, and March 3, 1843."

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

JAMES GUTHRIE,

Secretary of the Treasury.

Hon. LINN BOYD,

Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MINT OF THE UNITED STATES,

Philadelphia, January 28, 1854.

SIR: I submit the following report of the fineness and value of certain foreign gold and silver coin, as required by the acts of Congress of January 25, 1834, and March 3, 1843; said coins being therein made a legal tender upon certain conditions, which are contingent upon this report.

GOLD COINS.

The law provides that "gold coins of Great Britain, not less than $915\frac{1}{2}$ thousandths fine, shall be received at $94\frac{6}{10}$ cents per penny-weight." In a long series of years, and operating at times upon large quantities of such coin, we have not been able to find a higher average result than $915\frac{1}{2}$, and it was upon this basis that the enactment was framed. But under the present management of the British mint, and of its assay department, beginning fairly with the year 1852, there is an

upward tendency more strictly conforming with the legal standard of $916\frac{2}{3}$. The assay of a few pieces of 1852 and 1853 (the course of trade preventing the receipt of large quantities here) gives an average of $916\frac{1}{2}$, and the consequent rate would be $94\frac{7}{10}$ cents per pennyweight. But it will evidently require a large emission at this rate to make a perceptible improvement in any promiscuous parcel; and some years must elapse before the rate fixed by Congress can be elevated.

The gold coins of France are made current at $92\frac{9}{10}$ cents per pennyweight, provided their fineness be not less than 899 thousandths. Their legal standard is 900; but the actual fineness, down to 1852 inclusive, cannot be rated higher than 899.

Gold coins of Spain, Mexico, and Colombia, "of the fineness of 20 carats, $3\frac{7}{16}$ carat grains," equal to $869\frac{14}{100}$ thousandths, are receivable at $89\frac{9}{10}$ cents per pennyweight. While occasionally parcels have been found to be of this fineness, or slightly above it, they are frequently not higher than 866, and would, therefore, appear to be thrown out by the terms of the law. Moreover, the gold coins of New Grenada, which is a part of Colombia, have been minted since 1849 at the new legal rate of 900 thousandths, and, upon repeated trials, are found to average 894. But it is very rare to find any longer in circulation a gold coin of Spain, Mexico, or Colombia.

The gold coins of Portugal and Brazil, made current upon condition of being not less than 22 carats ($916\frac{2}{3}$ thousandths) fine, are really not higher than 914 thousandths; they are now only known amongst us as curiosities, and it is believed are scarce even in their own country.

SILVER COINS.

The Spanish pillar dollars, and the dollars of Mexico, Peru, and Bolivia, of not less than 897 thousandths fine, and 415 grains in weight, and the dollars of Chili and Central America, and those restamped in Brazil, of not less fineness than "ten ounces fifteen pennyweights in the pound," ($895\frac{8}{10}$ thousandths,) and 415 grains in weight, are receivable at one hundred cents each. The present average fineness and value of these coins, as appearing in our circulation, may be stated as in the ensuing table, with some doubt as to the item of Central America, whose coinage is very irregular.

Denomination.	Weight.	Fineness.	Value in cents.	
	Grains.	Thousandths.	Per piece.	Per ounce.
Spanish pillar dollars.....	412	898	99.7	116.1
Brazilian restamped dollars..	412	898	99.7	116.1
Dollar of Mexico, mixed....	416 $\frac{1}{4}$	899	100.8	116.2
Do...Peru,...do.....	415	905	101.1	117.0
Do...Bolivia.....	416 $\frac{1}{2}$	901	101.1	116.5
Do...Chili.....	416 $\frac{1}{2}$	901	101.1	116.5
Do...Central America...	416	870	97.5	112.5

The five-franc pieces of France, if not less than 900 thousandths fine, and 384 grains in weight, are made current at 93 cents. They continue to maintain this average to the year 1852, which is the latest date assayed here.

It is to be noted that the foregoing valuations of silver coin are based upon the legal rate of the United States, as fixed by the act of 1837. Under the act of March, 1853, the mint has been and is now paying a premium upon these rates to procure silver for coinage; consequently, the laws making them current may be considered nugatory and obsolete. The same remark, for other but obvious reasons, may be applied to all the gold coins mentioned in this report, except those of Great Britain and France.

I embrace this opportunity to suggest that there is no longer any propriety or necessity for legalizing the circulation of the coins of other countries. In no other nation, except in the case of some colonies, is this mixture of currencies admitted by law, either on the score of courtesy or convenience. When these laws as to foreign coins were passed our coinage was inconsiderable, but during the last few years the pieces struck, in number and value, it is believed, is scarcely inferior to that of any other country. The last year more than seventy-six millions of pieces were struck, of the value of upwards of sixty-four millions of dollars. If this suggestion is approved, and the laws which legalize foreign coins be repealed, it would be proper, by a standing regulation of the Treasury Department, or by legislative enactment, to require an annual assay report upon the weight and fineness of such foreign coins as frequently reach our shores, with a view to settle and determine their marketable value. Such a report would be a judicious substitute for the one now presented.

I have the honor to be, with great respect, your faithful servant,

JAMES ROSS SNOWDEN,
Director.

Hon. JAMES GUTHRIE,
Secretary of the Treasury.

